

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

Presents

An American Classic



Stephen Vincent Benet's
JOHN BROWN'S BODY

in the
MORRISON CENTER

February 1, 1986

A Tribute to Statesmanship

John Brown's Body

As the first event in the Hemingway Year sponsored by Boise State University, Fred Norman is offering *John Brown's Body* by Stephen Vincent Benet, Hemingway's contemporary.

Why?

The answer is that it is a powerful, timely, dramatic/intellectual statement appropriate to a university campus, with much to say to a troubled society. Overall, it illustrates Benet's assertion that "the true villain of American society is not the North or the South, but the buzzsaw of the mediocre mind."

Abraham Lincoln's fundamental wisdom was that the solution of any problem, including slavery, depended upon unity. Surely that message cannot be overemphasized in a city attempting to rebuild itself, a state facing economic readjustment, or a nation seeking a national purpose.

It seems appropriate to offer this play in response to those persons at Boise State University who have supported it through difficult and trying years. More striking, in some ways, are those Democratic and Republican leaders who have joined forces to use the play as a vehicle to raise funds for the Len B. Jordan and Frank Church endowments at the University. This is a remarkable statement of unity in itself.

And there is the focus on leadership, Lincoln's and Lee's, which transcends their deadly conflict. Lincoln marveled that each of his advisory groups represented "God's will," but that each representation was different. His humility was genuine and strong. When Abraham Lincoln got word of the South's surrender, his first order was, "Let the band play 'Dixie.'" How few leaders are without malice. It is the loser who should be saluted initially out of respect for his effort and for the contest itself, for a "great victor" needs little help at the moment of victory.

Notable also is that the three lead actors include a Boise State University vice president, a dean, and a graduate student, while the play and the chorus are directed by University employees. They practiced four hours a day for five months on their own time—for one performance. The leads are required to memorize 2,000 lines apiece. They will achieve excellence on purpose and make a major contribution to themselves and to their viewers—because they believe in the message of *John Brown's Body*.

John Brown: Was he a bloody-handed criminal or a sainted hero? How is the New England Puritan mother, who prayed for him, different from those in other nations today who pray for Castro, for Arafat? "And God will hear those prayers." "He will, my dear, but what will be His answer?" What about the slave trader? "He traded in niggers and loved his Savior." Are there no parallels with South Africa? Are there John Brown's there? Can we understand them?

The play, like the author, focuses on unselfish love of country, of service, necessary in times of crisis. When Benet was presented the Pulitzer Prize for this play in 1929 he stated that, "My highest honor is not winning the award, but the world's recognition of my America."

John Brown's Body is not a popular musical with a cast of hundreds singing and dancing to top hits, although it has music and may soon be made into a movie. Instead, it combines history and art to ask contemporary questions often too difficult to raise without conflict in any other way. I think it is precisely what a university ought to do, to make mediocrity unacceptable.

By Dr. John H. Keiser
President, Boise State University

An Evening for Statesmanship

Tonight, a few hundred friends of the late Senators Frank Church and Len Jordan will gather at the Morrison Center for a performance of Stephen Vincent Benet's play *John Brown's Body*.

The performance is to help raise money for the Len B. Jordan Endowment for Economic Studies and the Frank Church Chair of Public Affairs. But the performance and the effort to raise the money transcend mere fund-raising.

It is fitting that *John Brown's Body* was chosen as the benefit performance. Benet's poem, from which the play was adapted, is about a country torn by the bloodiest war in its history, but reunited to grow stronger than ever.

The poem speaks of the diverse character of America, which often defies understanding. It is an understatement to say that Idaho shares in this same diversity and complexity of character.

How else can you explain an Idaho electorate which, on the same day in 1962, sent two men to the Senate as different politically as Len Jordan and Frank Church?

Jordan, the Republican, was 63 years old. For him, election to the Senate capped a distinguished career in business and politics. Church, the Democrat, was 38, young enough to be Jordan's son.

But the differences went deeper than age. Jordan was a conservative, who eked out a living in Hells Canyon during the Great Depression. Church was a liberal, who as a young boy was drawn to the Democratic Party by President Roosevelt's efforts to save the country from the Depression.

Despite the gulf between them, Church and Jordan were a model team for the 10 years they served together. They disagreed on many foreign and domestic issues without being disagreeable. When it came to the interests of Idaho, they were as good as their handshakes.

"I don't think I heard them say a harsh word about the other," says William Campbell, Jordan's right-hand man.

It will cost about \$1 million to endow each of the chairs. So far, about \$300,000 has been raised. The money will eventually bring in first-rate scholars in economics and public affairs to lecture at Boise State University.

With so much work to do, supporters decided to take a tip from the two men whose memories they honor. They decided to work together.

"Both Bill and I believe you don't have the luxury of divisive debate," says Carl Burke, who was to Church what Campbell was to Jordan—a friend, confidant and campaign manager.

Burke says the cooperative spirit of Church and Jordan should extend beyond the efforts to raise \$700,000 for the endowments. He says it's the kind of cooperation the state needs now, as it heads into a difficult election year.

In the spirit of such cooperation, all the money raised will be divided equally by the endowments. Church and Jordan would have wanted it that way.



The Leads

Hope Benedict

Hope Benedict was born and raised in Salmon, Idaho. An honor student, Hope was valedictorian of her high school class. She graduated Magna Cum Laude from BSU in 1984 with a major in history. She appears in *Who's Who Among American High School Students*, was on the Dean's List while attending BSU and was a member of the BSU Honors Program. She received the University Club Scholarship for two semesters, and is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. Since coming to Boise in 1978 to attend BSU, Hope has held a variety of jobs, including that of front desk manager/assistant manager of the Idanha Hotel.

Hope's future plans include a Ph.D. in American and European Intellectual History. She would like to be a college history professor. Aside from a brief appearance in her first grade play as a hollyberry, this is Hope's stage debut.

Among the five characters Hope plays are Melora Vilas, 17, daughter of a northern family displaced by the Civil war, a survivor; Sally Dupre, a southern belle; Mary Lou Wingate, a tough 70-year-old woman running a southern plantation while the men are away at war; Mrs. Ellyat, mother of one of the heroes; Lucy Weatherby, a vapid, vacuous young southern woman without compassion; and Captain Ball, a self-righteous Yankee slaver.



Robert C. Sims

Robert C. Sims grew up in a small town in Oklahoma. He received a B.A. from Northeastern Oklahoma State College, an M.A. from the University of Oklahoma, and a Ph.D. in U.S. Economic History from the University of Colorado. Among the distinguished grants and fellowships he has received is the prestigious Fellowship for College Teachers awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities for ethnic studies at Columbia University. His numerous publications include several articles on the Japanese Americans during World War II. He is listed in *The Directory of American Scholars*. Presently, Bob is Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Public Affairs at BSU, a new school formed in July 1985 out of six departments taken from the College of Arts and Sciences. It is the school which administers the Frank Church Chair.

Bob will portray Jack Ellyat and Clay Wingate, the two heroes; John Brown; Charley Bailey, a Union soldier; northern and southern soldiers and will narrate key passages, including the opening of the play.



David S. Taylor

David S. Taylor is Vice President for Student Affairs at BSU. Originally from Chicago, he received his undergraduate degree from Northern Illinois University and his master's from Southern Illinois University. He has a Ph.D. in Higher Education and Psychology from Michigan State. He has served as President of the Northwest College Personnel Association and as Regional Vice President for the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. He is listed in *Outstanding Educators of America* and in the 1985-86 edition of *Who's Who in the West*. Previous to his appearance in *John Brown's Body*, David had two minor roles, one in a college production while he was a student and the other in a summer theater presentation.

David plays the roles of Lincoln; Lee; Cudjo, a Negro slave; John Brown; John Vilas, a northerner; and various other parts.



The Cast

DIRECTOR

Frederick J. Norman

Production Coordinator

Ted Osborne

Musical Director

Patricia Henderson

Technical Director

Frank K. Heise

LEADS

Actor A - Robert Sims

Actor B - David Taylor

Actor C - Hope Benedict

CHORUS

Under the direction of Patricia Henderson

Production Soloist

Daryl Martin

First Soprano

Pamela Piccard Johnson

Maria Lewis

Susan Nelson Phillips

Tenor

Gregg Forrey

Robert Morrell

John Stricklett

Second Soprano

Carol Cortne

Linda Morgan

Beth Ruddell

Dorinda Vevig, Pianist

Baritone

Ernie Carr

Ted Osborne

Alto

Mary Pirnie

Annette Tovey Renberg

Jeanetta Sterling

Mary Jane Webb

Bass

Jeff Klein

Wally Meyer

Bill Taylor

Michael Ward

DANCERS

Art Albanese

Carole Cortne

Barbara Gile

Steve Johnson

Dan Looney

Camille Meyer

Ted Osborne

Sandi Otero

Patty Paulson

Phil Sloan

Production Team

TECHNICAL CREW

Frank Heise, Technical Director

Sam Johnson, Stage Manager

R.C. Winnick, Chief Audio Engineer

BSU Student Assistants:

Greg Scott, Chief Electrician

Tod Winslow, Audio Assistant

Mike Payton, Projectionist

Jim Burdick, Assistant Stage Manager

PRODUCTION STAFF

Sandra Baggett

Al Cook

Arlene Eidam

Larry Grant

Josephine Goul

Frank Heise

Ann Hokom

Sam Johnson

Tom Long

Sandi Otero

Shelly Rose

R.C. Winnick

Stephen Vincent Benet

Stephen Vincent Benet was born on July 22, 1898 in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The grandson of a brigadier general and the son of a colonel, Benet was no stranger to the military. Both of his grandfathers, in fact, had served during the Civil War in opposing armies. As a result of his father's profession, Benet spent his youth in many parts of the United States and cultivated an intimate knowledge of America's diverse personalities—a knowledge which would later become the hallmark of his genius. He exhibited characteristics of a prodigy, browsing through his father's collection of Shakespeare and experimenting with his own talent for writing verse before the age of ten. Both of his older siblings had literary aspirations, encouraging young Stephen to follow a similar career path. His first volume of poetry was published when he was 17 and a senior in high school.

World War I interrupted Benet's undergraduate education at Yale. After serving as a clerk at the State Department, he finished his undergraduate work and went on to complete the requirements for a master of arts degree, which he received in 1920. He met Rosemary Carr while on a travelling fellowship in Paris and they were married in Chicago the following year.

In 1926, Benet received a Guggenheim Fellowship and returned to Paris to begin painstaking research for a monumental project—a narrative poem about the American Civil War. Both a physical separation from his country and extensive reading about its past combined to foster intense feelings of patriotism within Benet. After a year of arduous labor, Benet submitted the completed draft of *John Brown's Body* to his publishers in 1927. The response was overwhelming. Upon its publication, *John Brown's Body* became an instant classic and its author an American hero. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1929.

The Benet family returned to America in time to witness the collapse of the stock market and the dissolution of their short-lived financial prosperity. In 1930, Benet became seriously ill and the arthritis set in which would eventually cripple him. Though he had periods of recovered health and productivity, he never experienced the sustained creative energy which had enabled him to produce *John Brown's Body*. Publication of *The Devil and Daniel Webster* in 1937 firmly renewed his popularity. He became obsessed with the idea of writing a frontier history of America and the movement of its peoples. *Western Star* would be even more enormous in scope than *John Brown's Body*. Tragically, however, he did not live to complete the work. His last years were spent in extreme physical distress, yet he continued to display an inward tranquility. He died of a heart attack in his wife's arms on March 13, 1943. He was 44 years old. The finished portion of *Western Star* was published posthumously and awarded the Pulitzer Prize.



By Ted Osborne, Production Coordinator

Credits

Set Design, Frank Heise

Costumes:

Belle and Beau

Diane Clayton

Pete Smit

Hair, Jeff Day, Aura

Make Up, Frank Heise

Musical Arrangements:

Esther Post

Vern Swain

Keith B. Reed, banjo

Program Cover & Poster

BSU Art Department:

John Killmaster, Artistry

Gaye Hoopes, Lettering

BSU Printing and Graphics

Photography, Chuck Scheer, BSU

Publicity:

Larry Burke, BSU

Ted Osborne, M.C.

Esther Post, M.C.

KTVB

The Idaho Statesman

House Manager, Gil Forsythe, M.C.

Ushers, M.C. Auxiliary

Lobby Display, Leslie Pass, BSU Library

Medallion, Sunshine Mining Company

University Ticket Coordinator, Jackie Cassell

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SPECIAL THANKS

Boise State University and the cast and crew of *John Brown's Body* wish to extend a special thanks to those who worked so hard to make this evening a success. President John Keiser and Fred Norman from the University, Carl Burke and William Campbell from the benefit committee, and Mrs. Velma Morrison from the community provided vision and leadership. A special thanks is due the Church and Jordan families for their support of Boise State in general and this project in particular.

We especially appreciate the support of Boise Cascade Corporation, which donated the use of its headquarters and provided food for the reception.

To those who sold and purchased tickets, to those who gave so generously of their time and to those in the production who worked so hard, we offer our thanks . . . and congratulations on a job well done.